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DHAMMAPADA 97: A MISUNDERSTOOD PARADOX

1. *Introduction*

1.1. In his monograph on faith and knowledge in early Buddhism, Jan T. Ergardt states [1] that included in his hypothesis about the function of the Buddhist message lies the thought that we cannot see the function of faith as the main part of the « credo ». He concludes that this thought may seem paradoxical, but he believes that it may, on the other hand, make meaningful some well-known but puzzling words in the *Nikāya*-literature. He then proceeds to quote Dhp [2] 97:

assaddho akataññū ca sandhicchedo ca yo naro
hatāvakāso vantāso sa ve uttamaporiso.

1.2. He translates *assaddho* as « the one who is without faith ». The other translators of Dhp have avoided this translation, which is the standard one for the word, presumably because they have thought that lack of faith is inappropriate for an *uttamaporisa.* Gogerly translated « not confiding in others » [3], which I take to mean « not having confidence in others ». If this is so, then he was probably influenced by the cty, which explains: *attanā paṭiladdhaguṇaṃ paresaṃ kathāya na saddahatī ti assaddho* (Dhp-a II 187, 18-19). Fausböll translated « non credulus » [4], and Max Müller was doubtless relying on this when he ren-

1. JAN T. ERGARDT, *Faith and Knowledge in early Buddhism*, Leiden, 1977, p. 5.
2. The abbreviations of the titles of Pāli texts are those listed in the Epilegomena to the Critical Pāli Dictionary, Copenhagen, 1924-48. Other abbreviations: cty = commentary; PED = The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary; BHS = Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit; CPD = Critical Pāli Dictionary; AMg = Ardha-Māgadhī.
3. A. S. BISHOP (ed.), *Ceylon Buddhism: being the collected writings of Daniel John Gogerly*, Colombo, 1908, Vol. II, pp. 249-66.
4. V. FAUSBÖLL, *Dhammapadam*, Copenhagen, 1855, p. 18.

dered it as « the man who is free from credulity »[5]. The idea of « credulous » and « credulity » has been continued by Burlingame[6], PED[7], Radhakrishnan[8], and (for the BHS equivalent *aśraddha)* by Edgerton[9]. Mrs Rhys Davids translated « The man who taking (naught) on trust »[10], and Neumann rendered it as « Wer keinem Hörensagen traut »[11].

1.3. After the gloss just quoted (§ 1.2), the cty goes on to tell an introductory story whch is very similar to that related in the *Pubbakoṭṭhaka-sutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (S V 220, 24 - 222, 3), although the verse is not included there. That *sutta* relates how the Buddha asked Sāriputta whether he had faith (*saddahasi, Sāriputta?*) that the faculties of faith (*saddhā*), knowledge (*paññā*), etc., when practised, lead to *nibbāna* (*amata-pariyosānaṃ*). Sāriputta replies that he does not have faith in the Buddha in this matter (*na Bhagavato saddhāya gacchāmi*); other persons who had not realised this for themselves by knowledge (*paññāya*) would have faith in others in this matter (*yesaṃ hi taṃ bhante aññātaṃ assa..., te tattha paresaṃ saddhāya gaccheyyuṃ*). Those, however, who had realised this for themselves by knowledge would be without doubt (*nibbicikicchā*) in the matter; he himself had realised it for himself, and was without doubt in the matter. The Buddha congratulated him.

1.4. The story in the Dhp-a adds a detail not found in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya.* The other *bhikkhus* upbraid Sāriputta because he does not have faith in the Buddha (*sammāsambuddhassa na saddahati,* II 187, 4-5). The Buddha rebukes them, and points out that he had asked Sāriputta whether he believed that a person could gain the fruit of the path without practising the five faculties, and Sāriputta had said that he did not believe that it was possible. Sāriputta did not have faith in other persons about the fruit of the path, etc., because he had realised these things for himself. He was therefore blameless.

1.5. It is clear from this addition to the story that some listeners, whether those at the original occurrence or at a later time (if we are to see this detail as an extension to the story), did not understand that the verb *saddahati* has two slightly different meanings: « to have faith in » and « to take someone's word for something ». Sāriputta said: « The faculty of faith leads to *nibbāna.* I say this not because of faith in the Buddha, but because I know it from experience. I do not (need

5. F. Max Müller, *The Dhammapada* (Sacred Books of the East X), Oxford, 1881, p. 29.
6. E. W. Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, Part II, Cambridge (Mass.), 1921, p. 209.
7. PED, s.v. *saddha*[1].
8. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Dhammapada*, Oxford, 1950, p. 92.
9. F. Edgerton, *BHS Dictionary*, New Haven, 1953, s.v. *aśraddha.*
10. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, *Minor Anthologies* I, London, 1931, p. 35.
11. K. E. Neumann, *Der Wahrheitpfad*, Leipzig, 1893, p. 27.

to) take the Buddha's word for it, because I know ». The listeners took this to mean: « I do not take the Buddha's word for it, i.e. I do not have faith in the Buddha ».

1.6. What is quite clear is that there is here no hint that faith is not necessary; in fact the whole discussion is about the necessity of faith. The dispute is only whether Sāriputta has faith in the necessity of faith, or whether he has knowledge.

1.7. This view is reinforced by the cty on the other reference which PED gives for the meaning « credulous ». Sn 853 reads: *na saddho na virajjati*, and Nidd I explains: *sāmaṃ sayaṃ abhiññātaṃ attapaccakkhaṃ dhammaṃ, na kassaci saddahati aññassa samaṇassa vā brāhmaṇassa vā devassa vā Mārassa vā narassa vā brahmuno vā* (235, 9 - 237, 4): « When one has learnt the *dhamma* for oneself, one does not have to take it on trust from anyone else ». Nidd I then proceeds to quote the *Pubbakoṭṭhaka-sutta* verbatim, and concludes by quoting Dhp 97.

1.8. Dhp 97 is also quoted in the cty on the word *para-ppattiya* « dependent upon others » in Jātaka No. 322 (*Daddabha-jātaka*). It is said of those who are not *para-ppattiya: maggañāṇena paṭividdha-dhammā aññesaṃ kathentānaṃ pi na saddahanti na gaṇhanti. kasmā? attano paccakkhato ti, tena vuttaṃ « assaddho... uttamaporiso » ti* (Ja III 78, 1' - 18'): « Those who have gained the *dhamma* by knowledge of the path do not have faith in the words of others. Why? Because they have realised it by personal experience ».

2. *The paradox*

2.1. As stated above (§ 1.1), Ergardt concludes that his suggested translation of *assaddha* may seem paradoxical. In my review of his monograph [12], I have pointed out that *assaddha* and the other adjectives in Dhp 97 are each used in two senses. In his translation of Dhp, Radhakrishnan notes of this verse that « there seems here to be a play on different meanings (*śleṣa*) » [13], but he gives no hint of what he thinks the word-play is. In his interpretation of some of the adjectives in the BHS equivalent (*Udānavarga* 29.23) [14], Edgerton points out [15] that *saṃdhicchettar* is primarily, doubtless, the equivalent of *saṃdhi-cchedaka* « housebreaker, burglar », but used paradoxically in a good sense, like

12. To appear in OLZ.
13. RADHAKRISHNAN, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
14. *aśraddhaś cākṛtajñaś ca*
saṃdhicchettā ca yo naraḥ
hatāvakāśo vāntāśaḥ,
sa vai tūttamapūruṣaḥ.
15. BHS Dictionary, s.v. *saṃdhicchettar.*

aśraddha and *akṛtajña*. BHS *akṛtajña*, like Pāli *akataññu*, is well known as having two senses, one good and one bad [16]. For *aśraddha* in a good sense, Edgerton relies upon the meaning « credulous » given for Pāli *saddha* in PED [17]. Brough too notes the paradox in Dhp 97, but does not elaborate upon what he thinks it comprises [18].

2.2. None of these scholars, then, states specifically that each of the five adjectives in Dhp 97 can be taken in both a bad sense and a good one. It seems likely that the verse was originally intended as a riddle or puzzle, whereby the audience was expected to take each of the five adjectives in a bad sense, on first hearing [19], helped no doubt by the fact that the first of them, *assaddha*, is almost always used in a pejorative sense. The listeners would therefore expect the last *pāda* of the verse to be *sa ve adhama-poriso*, and only when the speaker, paradoxically, said « *uttama-poriso* » would they realise that each word had been used in a punning way, and they would have to go back to the beginning of the verse and take an alternative meaning for each word.

3. *The bad meanings*

3.1. *assaddha*: the most likely translation is the usual one of « without faith », as in the common phrase *assaddho samaṇo* [20]. It is, however, possible that it has the meaning « ohne Spendefreudigheit », which it has in contexts with *maccharin*, as Köhler has pointed out [21].

3.2. *akataññu*: this means «not knowing what has been done (for him)», i.e. « ungrateful ».

3.3. *sandhiccheda*: this means « housebreaker, burglar », as Edgerton surmised [22].

3.4. *hatāvakāsa*: this means « one who has destroyed, lost, missed, his opportunity ».

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16. *ibid.*, s.v. *akṛtajña*.
17. *ibid.*, s.v. *aśraddha*.
18. JOHN BROUGH, *The Gāndhārī Dharmapada*, London, 1962, p. 182.
19. It is, of course, possible that originally there were two verses, identical except for the final word. The first, intended to give the bad meanings, ended with *adhama-poriso*, while the second, giving the good meanings, ended with *uttama-poriso*. Of these two only the second remains.
20. See *Pāli Tipiṭakaṃ Concordance*, s.v. *assaddha*.
21. HANS-WERBIN KÖHLER, *Śrad-dhā- in der vedischen und altbuddhistischen Literatur*, Wiesbaden, 1973, p. 60.
22. BHS Dictionary, s.v. *saṃdhicchettar*.

3.5. *vantāsa*: Alsdorf quoted AMg *vantāsī* and Pāli *vantādo* in the sense of « eating, i.e. taking, what has been abandoned by someone else », and drew attention to the fact that in *Isibhāsiyāiṃ* 45.40 foll. the eating or drinking of one's own vomit is a metaphor for the defection from monkish discipline and relapse into worldly life [23]. We may translate as « eater of vomit » without defining whether it is one's own or another's which is being eaten.

4. *The good meanings*

4.1. *assaddha*: it is clear that Dhp-a (§ 1.2), Nidd I (§ 1.7), and Ja (§ 1.8) are taking *assaddha* in the sense of « not having (or needing to have) faith in others (because one already knows for oneself) », i.e. « not taking on trust ». It is possible that this is the correct way of taking the word [24], but there is, I think, an alternative and better interpretation. The second reference given for *assaddha* in PED is Sn 853. This occurs in the *Purābheda-sutta* (Sn 848-61), where the Buddha is asked about the (nature of) the best man (*pucchito uttamaṃ naraṃ*, 848). The Buddha replies that (the best man) *na saddho na virajjati* (853). It is clear that *na saddho* is good, and therefore *saddho* is bad, hence its translation « credulous ». This pāda has, however, a parallel at Sn 813: *na rajjati na virajjati* « he is neither em-passioned nor dis-passioned », i.e. an *arhat* has neither passion nor lack of passion, being simply indifferent. We can see that if *na rajjati* and *na saddho* are parallel, then *saddha* must be based upon the meaning « desire » which is attested for Sanskrit *śraddhā* from the late Vedic period and also for Prakrit *saddhā* [25], but has not hitherto been recognised in Pāli [26]. We can therefore translate *assaddho* as « without desire ».

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23. L. ALSDORF, *Vāntam āpātum*, in IL, 16, 1955, pp. 21-8, and especially p. 28. Surprisingly, although he quoted *vantāsa* from Dhp 97 as an example of the use of *vanta* in the sense of « abandoned » (p. 26, n. 7), he dealt with it only as a *bahuvrīhi* compound « giving up desire », and did not note that it could also be taken as a *tatpuruṣa* compound « eating what has been abandoned ». An extended form of this compound is doubtless to be seen in *vantāsika* « name of a class of Petas » (Mil 294, 16). Cf. *kheḷāsaka* (*-ika*) « eating spittle » (Vin II 188, 37; Dhp-a I 140, 1).

24. I am not entirely convinced that it could have this sense as a good meaning. The Buddha seems to make it clear that *saddhā* was not a bad thing for those persons who did not have *paññā*.

25. KÖHLER, *op. cit.*, p. 3 and p. 3, n. 11. See also the review of Köhler's book by Minoru Hara (IIJ 19, 1977, pp. 105-8), who gives further examples from Classical Sanskrit.

26. It is not impossible that another example in Pāli has been overlooked. The most common usage in Sanskrit is the instrumental singular *śraddhayā* « gladly ». The equivalent of this may be in the common Pāli phrase *kulaputtā saddhāya agārasmā anagāriyaṃ gacchanti*, « They gladly leave home ».

4.2. *akataññu*: the cty explains: *akataṃ nibbānaṃ jānātī ti akataññū sacchikatanibbāno ti attho*, i.e. it has the usual alternative meaning in Pāli « knowing the uncreated », i.e. « knowing *nibbāna* » [27].

4.3. *sandhiccheda*: the cty explains: *vaṭṭasandhiṃ saṃsārasandhiṃ chetvā ṭhito ti sandhicchedo*, «cutting the connection with the *saṃsāra*». PED is doubtless correct in seeing *sandhi* here with the meaning of *paṭisandhi* « re-connection » [28]. We can therefore translate as « cutting off, destroying rebirth ».

4.4. *hatāvakāsa*: the cty explains: *kusalākusalakammabījassa khīṇattā nibbattanāvakāso hato assā ti hatāvakāso*. Where the word occurs as an epithet of a Tathāgata at Bv-a 1, 16, Miss Horner translates it as «free from the accumulation of *kamma*» [29]. I presume that *avakāsa* here means « opportunity for (bad) actions », and I see a connection with the usage which we find in *an-avakāsa-kārin* (Mil 383, 22), which CPD translates as « not occasioning (a quarrel) » [30] and Miss Horner as « does not give an occasion (to a preceptor) » [31]. I therefore take its meaning in Dhp 97 to be: « one who has got rid of occasions (for quarrels, etc.) » or « rid of opportunities (for rebirth) ».

4.5. *vantāsa*: the cty explains: *catūhu maggehi kattabbakiccassa katattā sabbā āsā iminā vantā ti vantāso*. PED suggests « one who has given up all wishes » [32]. We can translate « one who has abandoned desire ».

5. *Conclusions*

5.1. Since there is nothing specifically Buddhist about Dhp 97, it is possible that its composition pre-dates the foundation of Buddhism. It is therefore possible that the set of bad meanings had already been lost when it was included in the Buddhist collections.

5.2. There is, however, one small piece of negative evidence which hints that, at the time of the compilation of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* the verse was still felt to have two sets of meanings. I deduce this from the fact that the verse is not included in the *Pubbakoṭṭhaka-sutta* (§ 1.3), although it is included in the quotation of that *sutta* in Nidd I (§ 1.7). The quotation of the verse with its statement that a man who was *assaddha* was nevertheless *uttama-porisa* would have been so appropriate to the case of Sāriputta that it is strange that it was not quoted. We

27. PED, s.v. *kataññu*.
28. *ibid.*, s.v. *sandhi*.
29. I. B. Horner, *The clarifier of the sweet meaning*, London, 1978, p. 1.
30. CPD, s.v. *an-avakāsa-kāri(n)*.
31. I. B. Horner, *Milinda's Questions*, Vol. II, London, 1964, p. 256.
32. PED, s.v. *vanta*.

may assume that either it was not known at all to the compiler(s) of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, or (more likely) it was known to him/them as being ambiguous and therefore dangerous to quote as an illustration.

5.3. It seems clear that by the time Nidd I was compiled the cty tradition had completely lost any idea that in Dhp 97 the use of the word *assaddha* was paradoxical. There is no trace in Dhp-a of any knowledge that even one of the five adjectives could have both a bad and a good connotation, and all five are explained as having only a good sense.

5.4. I think Ergardt was correct in rejecting the meaning « credulous » for *assaddha* in Dhp 97, but I am unable to accept his suggestion that it means « without faith » when applied to the *uttama-porisa*.